



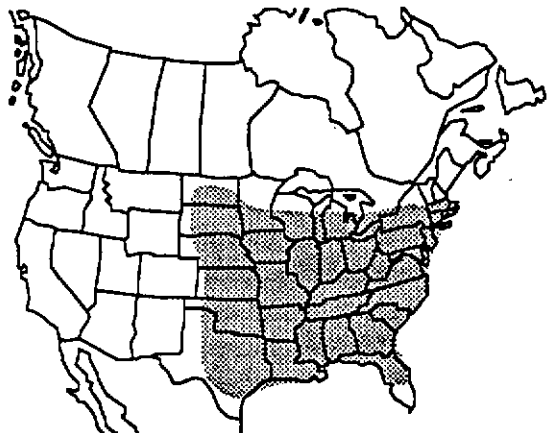
Natural Heritage &  
Endangered Species  
Program

Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife  
Route 135  
Westborough, MA 01581  
(508) 792-7270

THREATENED SPECIES OF MASSACHUSETTS

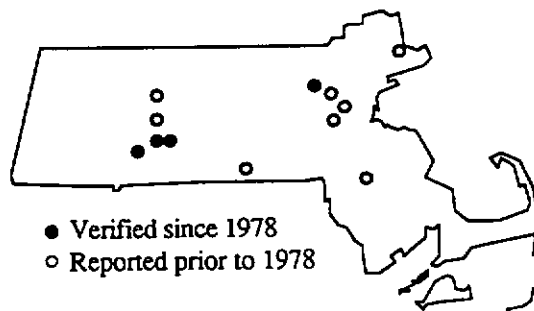
Violet Wood-sorrel  
(*Oxalis violacea* L.)

**DESCRIPTION:** Violet wood-sorrel is a low herbaceous perennial of the Wood-sorrel family (Oxalidaceae) that reaches a height of about 10–25 cm (4 - 10 in.). Its stemless leaves rise from a scaly, bulbous base. These glabrous (hairless) leaves are in clover-like arrangements of three leaflets, each shaped like an inverse heart and tinged red or purple above. The purplish to rose-violet, five-petalled flowers occur in flat-topped inflorescences in which the flowers are born on stalks that rise from a common point and that are more or less equal in length (umbels). Each flower is about 1 – 2 cm (0.38 - 0.75 in.) long. The umbels rise well above the leaves. Petals may occasionally be white, as well as purplish. The ten stamens (male floral parts) and the glabrous, green sepals



Documented Range of Violet  
Wood-sorrel

Gleason, H. A. The New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the Northeastern US & Adjacent Canada. NY Botanical Garden, 1952.



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

(members of the outermost floral whorl) have thickened orange tips. Violet wood-sorrel flowers from late May through early June and may flower again in the fall after its leaves have died.

**SIMILAR SPECIES IN MASSACHUSETTS:** Similar species include the common wood-sorrel (*O. montana*). However, common wood-sorrel has solitary white flowers that are strongly veined with pink.

**RANGE:** The documented range of violet wood-sorrel extends from Massachusetts to Michigan and North Dakota and south to Florida and Texas.

**HABITAT IN MASSACHUSETTS:** Violet wood-sorrel is a plant of upland woods, shaded slopes, and prairies. Specific habitats in Massachusetts are both dry and mesic (moderately moist) and include a dry, calcareous, semi-open, oak-conifer forest on a southern slope; a damp rich woods near a swampy brook; a wooded rocky slope near a vernal creek; an old road bed traversing an oak-hickory-hop hornbeam forest; and a damp patch of rich woods near a rock outcrop and river. Associated species include poison ivy (*Rhus radicans*), various sedges (members of the genus *Carex*), various oaks (*Quercus* spp.), and sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*). Glaucous sedge (*Carex flaccosperma* var. *glaucodea*) is an Endangered Massachusetts plant that has been found growing with violet wood-sorrel.

**POPULATION STATUS IN MASSACHUSETTS:** Violet wood-sorrel is presently listed as "Threatened" in Massachusetts. Individuals of all species listed in Massachusetts are protected from take (picking, collecting, killing...) and sale under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. Violet wood-sorrel is currently known from five sites (discovered or relocated since 1978) in four towns and nine historical sites (unverified since 1978) in Massachusetts. (One town has both current and historical sites and is represented by a single, solid dot on the town distribution map.) It is considered to be rare in Rhode Island, Delaware and Michigan and was present historically in Vermont and Wyoming.

**MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:** As with most rare species, little is known about violet wood-sorrel's exact habitat needs. The following comments are based primarily on observations of the various populations in Massachusetts. Here, violet wood-sorrel grows in both shade and filtered light. Since this species requires habitat of a semi-open character, it can be threatened by both deforestation and by forest succession to a closed canopy. It appears that too much shade may result in little flowering. Selective pruning of overshadowing shrubs and trees may be useful to ensure sexual reproduction of these populations. As none of the Massachusetts populations occur in full sun, complete opening of a canopy would probably be detrimental.

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